

Patience at Work at Work

“...How often must I forgive him [my brother]? Seven times? No,...seventy times seven times.” I have not really applied those words of scripture to patience before. They were reserved for **BIG** hurts. Yet, as a death by a thousand cuts leaves one just as dead, so a “thousand” impatient responses to daily tribulations can leave us spiritually deadened, unloving, uncaring, and dismissive of those in our lives.

When I listen to my aging mother’s third repetition of the same memory within five minutes with the same attention and reactions as the first time, I am giving the gift of patience. When I do the same every time she remembers and tells the story, I am giving life to the virtue of patience. Patience is an expression of love and respect for another person. So to be a patient person, to practice the virtue of patience, is to show love and respect; it is to be humble enough to put oneself second to another. This may be relatively easy toward a beloved parent. The challenge in life is to show such love, respect, and humility with all those in our lives.

At work I have seen impatience in myself when I leapt in and completed sentences or thoughts for the person with whom I was talking. A patient person chooses to let others complete their thoughts. Again, I often jumped to proposing solutions for another’s problems without letting him/her completely present his/her description of the problem. Sometimes that person’s need is to describe the problem to a supportive ear. Patience would allow that and, if needed, still have the opportunity to help resolve the problem, if that is wanted.

Patience is a reactive virtue. By that I mean it comes into play in reaction to a preceding act of our own or of another. We do not start with patience or impatience; we choose it as a way to deal with something that affects us. We miss a golf shot; we react. A fellow worker or a clerk ignores our request; we react. We give directions and they are not followed completely or accurately; we react. Someone seemingly without ending repeats an act or a sound to the point of irritation; we react. Between those external actions and our reaction is our moment of choice. The choice is between a humble, loving response—not necessarily ignoring the irritating behavior—or an outburst of spite and anger.

Calls to customer service when I believe the company has done me wrong really expose my impatience. Looking back over my experiences with them, I realize I have been wrong as often as the company has made a mistake. I have recognized that I did not lose my patience. No! I chose impatience! Unfortunately, I chose an attitude of impatience when I could have and should have had the humility to choose patience. When the person I am speaking to cannot resolve my problem, I can still ask for his/her supervisor without putting anger and irritation into the request.

My mother, as I suspect almost every mother, told me many times to count to 10 when I was angry. I now recognize this advice as creating the space to decide how to react not just to delay impatient actions. Space to make the humble response—“I may be wrong.” Space to choose the response you would make to a powerful person—“I will show respect.” Space to choose the response you would make to one you love—“I love you and care for you; I want what is best for you.”

How many times should I be patient?

PATIENCE — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of patience in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of patience in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of patience in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based patience in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?